

*Newsletter article #1* 

## It's alive!

Many people don't realize that soil, especially healthy soil, is full of life. Millions of species and billions of organisms make up a complex and diverse mix of microscopic and macroscopic life that represents the greatest concentration of biomass anywhere on the planet.

Bacteria, algae, microscopic insects, earthworms, beetles, ants, mites, and fungi are among them. All together, their value has been estimated at \$1.5 trillion a year worldwide.

Like other living creatures, the organisms in the soil also need food and shelter. Some feed on dead organic matter, and some eat other microbes. As a group, they cycle nutrients, build the soil and give it structure.

The healthiest soils are those with a diver¬sity and abundance of life. Farmers with the healthiest soils nurture that life by creating a diversity of plant life above the soil surface, with year-round ground cover, no tillage, and judicious pesticide use.

Understanding that the soil is full of life is a game-changer for farmers who are farming with healthy soils in mind. For those producers, farming centers around feeding the organisms that build healthy soils.

To learn more about soil health, and to meet some of the farmers who are "Unlocking the Secrets in the Soil," visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

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